

October 10, 1990  
Editorial to persuade: Education

~~amended~~

Joseph Bustillos

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Education: "One of the few things a person is willing to pay for and not get." William L. Bryan.

Like an embarrassing plea for money from a ne'er-do-well relative, the good ol' education system will be tapping voters on the shoulder this November. Dotting the November ballot will be several propositions to authorize the selling of bonds to raise money for the educational system.

That something is amiss with California's educational system is not being questioned here. What is being questioned is whether another infusion of cash is the answer to the problem.

"Earlier this decade, a Presidential Commission on Education reported that 'if a foreign government had imposed this system of education on the U.S., we would rightly consider it an act of war,'" Byte columnist Jerry Pournelle.

One of the items often mentioned in improving the school system is placing more computers in the classroom. But computer futurist and one of the founders of Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center Alan Kay says that putting computers into schools is like putting pianos in every classroom because the state legislature thought that would make the students into musicians. "It's not going to help," Kay said. "Any musician will tell you that music is not in a piano."

I don't think  
this analogy  
is very  
appropriate

Kay says that "the way to save education is to get parents directly involved in the welfare of the children." Kay supports ideas like the one proposed by Lee Iaccoca and the National PTA where parents are given half a day off with pay each month to visit their kids' schools.

*awkward* "You don't need all this [technology]. You just need the parents to make sure the television is off for a reasonable amount of time, parent involvement, parents coming into the classroom, the parent obviously valuing what the life of the child is. And the children will respond every time," Kay said.

Pournelle says that placing more technology in the classroom might bring about enough change and innovation that the real business of education might be rediscovered. He notes a government report that noted the similarity to the educational system and the Soviet system of collectivized agriculture. Anyone witnessing the ponderous task of managing a system the size of Los Angeles' educational system can clearly imagine how the task of education becomes so easily derailed.

Education: "A kind of state-supported baby-sitting service."  
Gerald Kennedy.

Pournelle's idea is that as the micro<sup>computer</sup> contributed the de<sup>centralizing</sup> to the soviet system, so it might contribute to placing the power of education back in the classroom.

But is it state bonds that are going to make the difference, or actions of individuals such as Kay and Pournelle and Iaccoca?

Education: "Something which makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave."  
Lord Brougham.

University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom, in his book, "The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students," notes that the business of education is to provide the citizens of this democracy with the tools to adequately participate in this democracy. Perhaps Pournelle is right. Well placed technology can only benefit the students. But it will never happen unless we remind ourselves that it isn't the technology or bond money making it happen. The debacle of misguided educational theories are all around us.

split  
infinitive

Education: "One of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought." Bertand A. Russell.

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topic: education begins with the individual and not school bonds

sources: Byte magazine, Sept 1990, pp. 70, 232

Allan Bloom, Closing of the American Mind, 1985

Webster's New World Dictionary of Quotable Definitions, 1988